

## Patronyms in Rhopaloceran Nomenclature

Thomas E. Dimock

111 Stevens Circle, Ventura, California 93003

**Abstract.** There has been an increasing tendency for many recent authors to assign patronyms to the majority of the new taxa they describe. This practice deviates from the precedent established by Linnaeus, Fabricius, and their colleagues. Nomenclature was originally created to serve as a means of systematic descriptive labelling. Because patronyms fail in this respect, recommendations are proposed which would limit their numbers in future descriptions.

A patronym is a Latinized name of a person assigned to a taxon. People from ancient Greece, such as Hippocrates, Marcellus, and Croesus, have had their names applied to species of Papilionidae. Mythological patronyms abound in our nomenclature and are familiar to all lepidopterists: Eurydice, Diana, Danaus, Atalanta, and Apollo are but a few examples. Feminine names, more so than masculine names, are frequently assigned to new taxa without Latinization. Many actually have Greek or Latin origin and persist unchanged in many cultures. Examples are *anna*, *annabella*, *doris*, *chloe*, *phoebe*, *Athena*, *Patricia*, and *Vanessa*.

This paper does not deal with the above types of patronyms as they were widely used by Linnaeus and his followers and have an appropriate place in modern nomenclature. The purpose of this paper is to call attention to and address the current tendency to give Latinized surnames and Christian or given names to the majority of new taxa. While the surname patronym has been used to some degree since the time of Linnaeus, its present proliferation is cause for concern if the example set by Linnaeus is to continue. A review of names with his authorship (1758) shows he had a great sense of responsibility, a good imagination, and a sensitivity towards assigning descriptive and meaningful names.

Descriptive names are not here advanced as being the only or best alternative to patronyms, but they are one of the more useful alternatives, and this advantage will be discussed. Other useful names can be created from geographical, classical, barbarous and native names, and other sources listed by Jaeger (1955).

The assignment of patronyms is certainly a personal activity, on behalf of both the author of the name and the recipient whose name becomes that of the taxon. Because of this personal nature, and, to state it bluntly, because

many egos are involved, I will not cite authorship of the patronyms used as examples in the following discussions. It is not my intent to unjustly criticize or put on the spot any one author or claim that his contributors to lepidopterology are not valuable; this is not a personal attack. It is also not my intent to judge the worthiness of any patronym recipient. The examples to be cited are meant only as examples of a general trend and are not singled out to embarrass any one person or group of people.

Is there a problem? If the only purpose in assigning labels to entities was to assess the number of entities in the world, then Arabic numerals would suffice: species 1, 2, 3, and so on. But nomenclature exists for descriptive reasons, and patronyms fail in this respect to nearly the same degree as numerals.

It is unfortunate that all who would like to be doing taxonomic revisionary work are not able to do so, but such are the demands of our society and economy. Of those workers fortunate enough to be in such situations are many who have shown a total or strong bias towards assigning patronyms. There are authors who have given identical patronyms to collections of different new species. Others have indiscriminately assigned patronyms to honor every relative, colleague, acquaintance, and friend-of-a-friend, and when it appears they have exhausted their lists of personal names, they start over again by assigning the same patronyms to new taxa. These practices show a total lack of imagination and absence of taxonomic creativity with no regard to the butterflies burdened with their names or other lepidopterists who must use the names. The situation has become the worst with the neotropical Rhopalocera, where most new taxa are found, but is prevalent among more recently described nearctic butterflies.

To illustrate this trend, a review of all the generic, specific, and subspecific names was made using Miller and Brown (1981). The year of original description of each taxon was noted and these were summarized by decade. The percentage of all names that are patronyms was computed. The results are presented in the graphs in Figures 1 and 2. The progressive increase in the number and percentages of patronyms is obvious.

What are the probable reasons taxonomists assign patronyms when so many other appropriate alternatives exist? It would be difficult to pose this question to authors so biased without causing some suspicion, animosity, or implied disapproval towards their work, but from a review of patronyms in use it is not difficult to summarize the main reasons they have been given. Listed in suspected order, the most frequent first, the reasons patronyms are given are:

1. To honor a colleague, collector, or discoverer. This honor has been bestowed upon both great and not so great lepidopterists, as well as biologists from related disciplines. All the notable lepidopterists of the past have been immortalized in the literature: *Fabriciana*, *Batesia*,

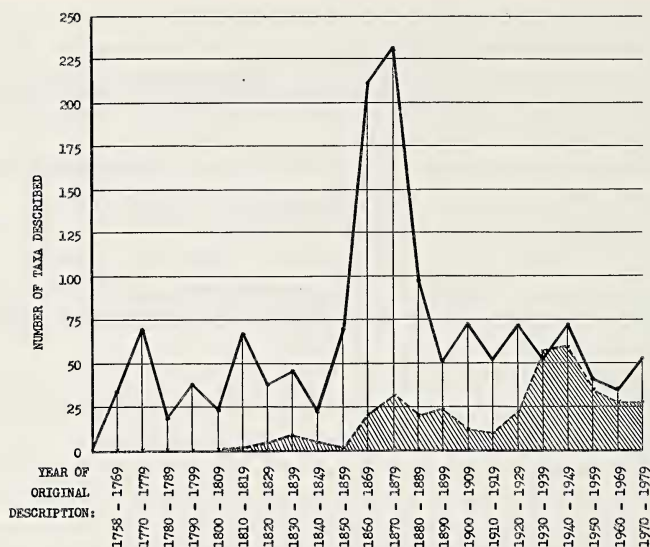


Fig. 1. Numbers of taxa described from 1758 to 1979, summarized by decade. Solid line: nonpatronyms. Dashed line, shaded area: patronyms.

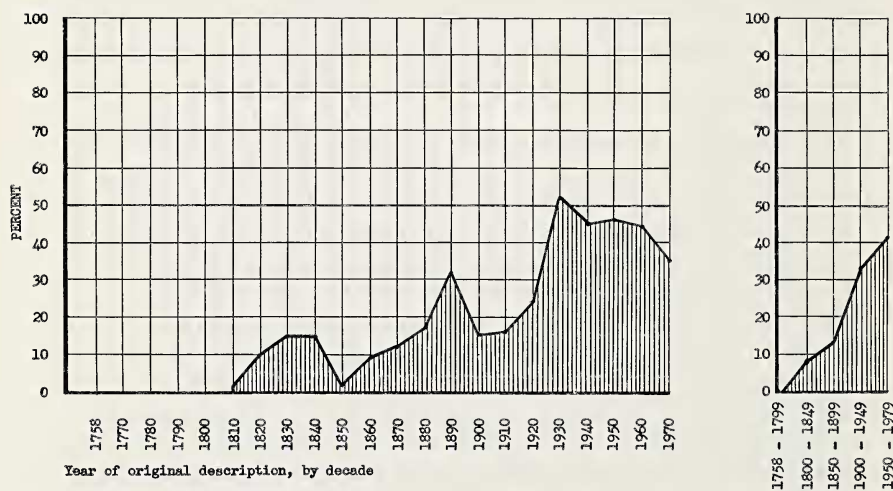


Fig. 2. Percentages of new taxa described as patronyms. Left graph: percentages of patronyms (shaded area) summarized by decade. Right graph: same, summarized by 50-year intervals (except beginning and ending years).

*hollandi*, *comstocki*, *martini*, *wrighti*, and *edwardsii* are but a few. A greater number of lepidopterists from the present are now receiving their own patronyms, and because many are receiving more patronyms than past notables, the question arises, is a living lepidopterist more notable with, say, four patronyms than a past lepidopterist is with only one? Also, how many times must the same person be honored with patronyms before he is considered adequately honored? As with any award or honor, the more abundantly it is bestowed, the less its prestige. Lepidopterists, as with all biologists, are remembered and regarded more for their work and contributions to science than for the number of patronyms they bestow or receive, and our organizations have created their own appropriate awards for honoring these achievements.

2. To honor a spouse, family member, or relative. Because spouses and family members frequently accompany lepidopterists on collecting expeditions and are inevitably volunteered into some amount of collecting assistance, they are natural recipients for patronyms. In our society male lepidopterists unfortunately vastly outnumber female lepidopterists, so it is the male's spouse that is usually the patronym recipient, and the large number of feminine patronyms in the literature is evidence of this fact. Some feminine given names lend themselves to Latinization more readily than others, as stated in the introduction, and no objection is made to these cases. Andria, Anna, Barbara, Berenice, Helena, Iris, Julia, Laura, Rita, and Stella are all in use in western society and appear in nearctic nomenclature unchanged. The objection is made to those names which must be amended and therefore become obvious patronyms: *jacquelineae*, *joanae*, *beulahae*, *juliae*, *estelleae*, *mariae*, *florenceae*, and *gayleae* are only a few examples.

3. A real, implied, or imagined obligation to a sponsor or employer. The threat of losing one's funding or employment could be, and probably is, a reason that a worker would want to shower his benefactor with patronyms. The situation may be as mild as a desire to show the supervisor what a fine job the worker is doing and how much gratitude he has for his sponsor. At the other extreme, the employer or sponsor may insist that his workers assign patronyms in honor of their superiors, who are unable or unwilling to do the work themselves. Similar relationships may exist between instructor and student or researcher and field collector, however in this last case it is the collector who expects to be honored with patronyms if the researcher wishes to continue receiving the collector's specimens.

4. "It's easier to give a patronym than it is to think up a meaningful, descriptive name." Possibly so, but after all the time spent in research, study, and preparation of the new species and its original description, the few moments it takes to apply a descriptive name to some aspect of the insect which makes it unique, or merely interesting, should be a simple task for a researcher of any integrity. There are even books available to

make this work easier (Borrer, 1969; Jaeger, 1955). If the worker is still unable to come up with an appropriate name, he can surely accept suggestions from his colleagues.

5. "I have so many new taxa to describe, I don't have the time to dream up descriptive names." The preceding comment applies to this statement. Linnaeus, Fabricius, and Bates certainly had no problems coming up with names for their hundreds of new taxa.

6. One-upmanship: "I've got more species named after me than you have." It is hard to believe that in a scientific community such as ours this attitude exists, but in fact it does. The application of patronyms for this reason alone is currently in practice. An appropriate response to this unprofessional, immature attitude eludes me.

immature attitude eludes me.

When a researcher has discovered that the insect before him represents an undescribed taxon, what would be the advantage of assigning a descriptive or other nonpatronymic name to it? A descriptive name would call attention to some difference between it and related species. From its name alone, we know that *Asterocampa subpallida* (Barnes and McDunnough) differs from other *Asterocampa* in having a pale underside. We know something of the habits of *Aglais urticae* and *Vanessa cardui* because Linnaeus named them after their larval foodplants. We also know something of the distribution of *Coenonympha californica* Westwood, *Thessalia chinatiensis* (Tinkham), *Limenitis archippus floridensis* (Strecker), and *L. astyanax arizonensis* (W. H. Edwards) from only their names, as well as the habitats of *Apodemia mormo deserti* Barnes and McDunnough, *Erebia disa subarctica* McDunnough, and *Callophrys dumetorum* (Boisduval). Even though *Euphydryas editha nubigena* (Behr) is not literally born in the clouds, its habitat, from treeline to 12,000 feet, is frequently enshrouded in clouds. Thus *E. e. nubigena* is doubly blessed with a name that is both descriptive and aesthetic.

Given the nymphalid genus *Polygonia* Hubner, it is a fairly safe assumption that most lepidopterists, even if they had never before seen the following species, would have a good chance of associating the correct name with the correct specimen: *Polygonia* ("many angles") *interrogationis* (Fabricius), "question mark"; *comma* (Harris), "comma"; *g-argenteum* Doubleday and Hewitson, "silver g"; *c-album* (Linnaeus), "letter c"; and *c-aureum* (Linnaeus), "gold c". It is also probable most readers would have a good chance of recalling other members of the genus following a review of their habits and habitats: *satyrus* (W. H. Edwards), from the Greek *Satyros*, a sylvan (forest) diety; *faunus* (W. H. Edwards), from the Latin *Faunus*, a diety of fields and herds; *hylas* (W. H. Edwards), from the Greek *hyle* and Doric *hyla*, a wood: in Edwards' name meaning "belonging to the forest"; *silvius* (W. H. Edwards), from the Latin *silva*, a wood or forest, again in this usage meaning "of the woods"; *zephyrus* (W. H. Edwards),

from the Greek *Zephyros*, the west wind, probably referring to both its flying ability and its western distribution. There are further examples in this genus, but these names are sufficient to illustrate the descriptive and aesthetic possibilities available to all authors. W. H. Edwards certainly demonstrated a professional sensitivity in this genus.

Contrast the preceding names with the following patronyms. It is unlikely that anyone who has not made a concerted effort to memorize the associations between names and butterflies could take a box of unlabelled specimens and, without references, attach the appropriate names. These names reveal nothing about any aspect of the insect: (Hesperiidae): *Stallingsia jacki*, *S. smithi*, *Turnerina hazelae*, and in the genus *Agathymus*: *judithae*, *macalpinei*, *hoffmanni*, *baueri*, *freemani*, *ricei*, *rindgei*, *gilberti*, *micheneri*, *escalantei*, and so on. Or, for another example, new species of *Calephelis* (Riodinidae), all described in 1971: *C. freemani*, *dreisbachi*, *stallingsi*, *matheri*, *clenchi*, *browni*, *schausi*, and *burgeri*. Or *Cyllopsis* (Satyridae) species: *freemani*, *windi*, *dospassosi*, *henshawii hoffmannii*, *nabokovi*, *escalantei*, *schausi*, *diazi*, *steinhauserorum*, *nelsini*, *jacquelineae*, and *rogersi*. The only information we can be sure of is that the authors of these names knew, to some degree, the person whose name was patronized.

These contrasting examples illustrate only one of the advantages of descriptive names over patronyms, and no claim is made here that all nonpatronyms will as easily lend themselves to associations. Mythological patronyms may not be directly descriptive, but when the mythology behind the name is known, the application is often clarified. Parnassus is a mountain in Central Greece and in mythology was sacred to Apollo. This relationship was recognized by Linnaeus as similar to the relationship *Parnassius apollo* has with its mountain habitat, hence the name he assigned to the butterfly. Further examples in our nomenclature can easily be investigated with a good dictionary or book on Greek mythology. The creation of descriptive and nonpatronymic names can be so interesting and rewarding it is puzzling that so many authors are biased against them.

What can be done to reverse the trend of assigning patronyms and reestablish nomenclature as a more descriptive system? The following recommendations are hereby proposed as a guide for authors creating new names for taxa. I recommend that:

1. Patronyms be limited to 1 in 20 new taxa. An author must not assign a patronym until after he/she has already described 19 taxa by nonpatronyms.

2. Patronyms not be available for taxa higher than species rank.

3. Double and triple patronyms be unacceptable. (For example: *Erebia youngi rileyi*, *Limenitis weidemeyerii oberfoelli*; triple patronyms would have the Genus, species, and subspecies all patronyms.)

4. A patronym not be acceptable for use in a genus until after 19 taxa in

that genus receive nonpatronyms.

5. Patronyms not be acceptable for use in an existing genus in which more than 5% (1 in 20) of its species already have patronyms.

6. Any one person not receive more than one patronym, whether from his/her surname or given name.

7. For a family of collectors or biologists, the same surname patronym be used only once.

8. Anagrams of patronyms be unacceptable, including those made from parts of 2 or more personal names. (*Aremfoxia*, *Harkenclenus*.)

9. Binomial, trinomial, or hyphenated surnames be unacceptable for patronyms, and surnames preceded by particles be unacceptable. (Examples: *mcalpinei* (sic), *mcfarlandi* (sic), *mcisaaci* (sic), *Mcclungia* (sic): "If the surname begins with the particle *Mac*, *Mc*, or *M'*, the particle is written *Mac* and combined with the rest of the name." (Borror, 1960))

10. The addition of a Latinized prefix (*pseudo-*, *neo-*, etc.) does not change the fact that the name is still a patronym and therefore is subject to these recommendations. (Examples: *pseudocarpenteri* (sic); *pseudorotgeri* (sic): "Proper names should not be used with other roots in the formulation of scientific names." (Borror, 1960))

11. Geographical place names that are also surnames not be used to circumvent the above recommendations.

Had Linnaeus established the unacceptability of patronyms it is likely we would still be following his example today. However, I am not Linnaeus, and the preceding recommendations will probably not be taken seriously by most readers and will certainly be instantly dismissed by those now assigning patronyms to the greatest degree. Their arguments are not difficult to predict.

Some authors may argue that we are free society of scientists and to restrict their choices of names is an infringement of their personal freedom. Their freedom is already restricted. The very existence of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature is testament to the desire of the scientific community to impose order in an area where disorder would otherwise result. Above and beyond any author's "right" to name an insect whatever he wants is his obligation to the entire scientific community. He has a responsibility to all his colleagues to assign an appropriate name to a new insect because this name will forever be in the literature and will be used by others long after he and the patronym honoree have passed on. A statement by Ehrlich (1957) is still very appropriate: "... a scientific name is a tool, not an end in itself. A person's name after a scientific name is in no way an honor; it is there to fix the *responsibility* for that name on the individual proposing it." (Italics his.) This principle should be posted above every nomenclaturist's desk.

Other authors will argue, "I discovered it. It's my bug and I'll name it whatever I want." There are two important points to be made about this

argument. The first is that butterflies, like all organisms, are public domain and belong to no one person, not even the authors of their names, but to everyone. A patronym implies possession, as does its equivalent common name. *Limenitis lorquini* is commonly called "Lorquin's Admiral", not the nonpossessive "Admiral named after Lorquin". Second, an author does not actually have the right to name an insect whatever he wants, as his choices, as stated previously, are somewhat regulated by the I. C. Z. N.

Patronym recipients may claim, "I have four species names after me. This has encouraged my perseverance in the pursuit of entomology and caused me to think even more highly of the names' authors." The bragging aspect of this remark was discussed above under "One-upmanship". There are no species named after me and my lepidopterological enthusiasm is very intense: the subject becomes more and more interesting every year. No one in our discipline would argue that lepidopterology was not inherently fascinating, but if one's interest is subject to, and is proportional to, the number of patronyms with which he is so honorably showered, then perhaps he is in lepidopterology for the wrong reasons. Would his interests diminish if one or more of his own patronyms was sunk into synonymy? To think that the action of having one's name bestowed upon an animal (or plant) will somehow bring some prestige and recognition to that person is very curious, but this is probably a subject more appropriate for study in *Psychology Today*.

There will likely be other arguments supporting the continued prevalence of patronyms, but they can only be self-serving. In conclusion, I hope this discussion has put light on the patronym problem. As stated by Ehrlich and Murphy (1982), "Taxonomists should not be creating nomenclature primarily for their own use, but as a general tool useful to all biologists." This statement is directly applicable to those assigning patronyms.

### Literature Cited

- BORROR, D. J., 1960. Dictionary of word roots and combining forms. N-P Publications, California.
- EHRlich, P. R., 1957. Systematics and subspecies. *J. Lepid. Soc.* 11:155-157.
- EHRlich, P. R. & D. D. MURPHY, 1982. Butterfly nomenclature: A critique. *J. Res. Lepid.* 20:1-11.
- JAEGER, E. C., 1955. A source-book of biological names and terms. Third Ed. Charles C. Thomas, Illinois.
- LINNAEUS, C., 1758. *Systema naturae*. L. Salvius, Holmiae.
- MILLER, L. D. & F. M. BROWN, 1981. A catalogue/checklist of the butterflies of North America. *The Lepidopterists' Society Memoir No. 2*.